

Owen County 20/20

Agricultural Taskforce Committee Recommendations

AGRICULTURAL VISION

As Defined by the Owen County Phase I Board

As people visit or move to the county, a typical comment is that they enjoy the rural atmosphere that comes with a farming-based economy and way of life. We believe that this rural atmosphere is desirable, and that the preservation of this rural flavor is the key to allowing farm families to survive and prosper on their farm .

Agriculture's Impact on Employment in Owen County

Farm income tends to drive the total economy of the county.

- Agriculture is the primary source of county employment .
- 33% of the total employment
- 1,200 people employed.

Agriculture's Economic Impact in Owen County

Agriculture accounts for 30% of total personal income.

- 11% of the total personal income comes from farming
- Farmers received \$22 million in receipts in 1997 (16.5 million in crops and \$5.7 million in livestock)
- Total farm earnings - \$6.6 million in 1997.

Agricultural Issues in Owen County

- I. Farming may become obsolete. Many older farmers are advising their children to not consider farming as a career.
 - Those younger people who do want to farm are generally depending on tobacco to pay the bills.
 - Most young farmers are farming part-time, because the farm income cannot pay for the farm and provide them with the standard of living they desire.
 - The average age of the typical farmer is 54 years.
 - Only 8% of the total number of farmers are under 35 years of age
 - 25% of the total are over 65 years of age.
- II. The potential for economic growth diminishes with fewer farms.
- III. Preservation of rural atmosphere in jeopardy when farms are sold.
- IV. Our best and brightest youth will not return to live and work here.

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Owen County's Assets

(taken from the 20/20 survey results)

- Agriculture is the major industry in the county, and the fuel that runs the county's economy.
- New agricultural ventures such as the Winery and the Robinson farm are boosting our economy
- 800 farms in the County
- Average farm size 190 acres
- Owen County farmers are diversifying and looking for alternative enterprises to tobacco.
- There is "a strong sense of community " that is reflected in the willingness to work together "to make improvements for the community."
- The strong families, the interdependence reflected in neighbors helping neighbors, and the deep faith of the people are grounded in this farming heritage.
- Owen County as a richly diverse natural environment and a beautiful rural landscape
- Owen County is blessed with forests ("the largest wooded area in central Kentucky"), rolling hills
- "so many natural ponds, creeks and streams"
- abundant wildlife ("we have been #1 in the state in population of deer harvested for years.")
- we are located within 1½ hours of 3 million people in 3 major metropolitan centers

Owen County's Agricultural Challenge's

- the challenge for Owen County is how to stimulate new economic activity
- Develop new employment opportunities without jeopardizing the small town way of life
- or the rural landscape that makes Owen County such a special place to live.
- There is a lack of well defined markets for many crops or livestock that might have potential in our soils and our locations. The demand may be out there, but there is no market structure that a producer can work into.
- Finding labor has become a major problem for many producers.
- Many producers don't have the extra cash or the financial backing that it will take to get into a new enterprise.
 - Many crop enterprises will take expensive new equipment.
 - Livestock enterprises come with a major investment in breeding stock and facilities
- Urban encroachment is causing farm land to be used for development.
- No land use plan in place

AGRICULTURAL GOALS

- ↳ Develop a working cattle herd at the High School to teach top-quality genetics; intensive grazing; best management practices, and new techniques in the cattle industry.
 - (We would suggest that the Vo-Ag Dept be responsible with some Phase I funding for start-up, School Board, Vo-Ag, progressive local farmers, & ag representatives to implement as advisory committee.)
- ↳ Develop a trail riding tour of Owen County.
 - (This could possibly be an Extension Council project, using a local advisory committee made up of horse/land owners)
- ↳ Agri-tourism Development:
 - Campground for hunters
 - Wildlife-related businesses -such as Pheasant Ridge
 - Winery
 - We recognize these would be private ventures, and the county would need to support the entrepreneurial development and growth of these businesses.
- ↳ Continuing education for farmers to improve profitability of beef production through improved management of forage resources.
 - (A logical responsibility of the Extension Service)
- ↳ Develop a Certified Kitchen
- ↳ Adopt the Owen Co Vision Plan, as outlined by the UK Landscape Architecture class
 - (Fiscal Court would probably need to take the lead on this)
- ↳ Hire an Agricultural Marketing Specialist.
 - (We would suggest ½ funding from Phase I and ½ from Fiscal court for a tourism director.)
- ↳ Permanent Facility for Farmer's Market.
 - (we believe this would be a Chamber of Commerce responsibility)